

NNMC claims it's overburdened by IPRA requests

T.S. Last



ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — Administrators at Northern New Mexico College are complaining the college is being overburdened by Inspection of Public Records Requests and that it is costing the financially strapped college money it can't afford to spend.

"The number of requests is so large that it has exceeded our ability to respond internally," said Domingo Sanchez, NNMC's vice-president for finance and administration. "We are currently forwarding the requests to our legal counsel, who determines whether requested records are of a nature that can be released."

The college said Wednesday it has received more than 30 IPRA requests in the past month, 20 of them made by a former employee at the college. The requests have included budget records, email correspondence and personnel files.

The college estimates the cost of using legal counsel to handle requests to be more than \$15,000.

Sanchez said handling the requests internally has already cost the college \$8,000, money the school could use elsewhere.

Last spring, the college eliminated three degree programs, a childcare program and several faculty positions in an effort to save money.

College officials have been at odds with students and faculty in recent years.

In April, the student senate and faculty issued "no confidence" votes against administration, claiming mismanagement of budgets and grant funds, filling positions by appointment rather than by search, and a lack of transparency.

Several former faculty members have complained that their contracts were not renewed because they spoke out against the college.

Earlier this year, a New Mexico Higher Education Department official said the department had received an unusually high number of complaints about the college's administration.

The college has denied it has retaliated against employees for speaking out.

NNMC President Nancy "Rusty" Barceló said the recent influx of IPRA requests is causing even more unrest on campus.

"Requests for emails and personnel folders are creating fear among staff and faculty, some of who (sic) have been personally harassed by former employees," she said in a statement.

While the college employs only one person to handle records requests, the college says other employees have been called away from their primary duties to assist in responding. It estimates it will take 200 hours of employee time to respond to the requests it has already received.